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MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

by Dorothy Cameron Disney AND Milton Mackaye

M A R Y
R O B E R T S
R I N E H A R T

BY

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MARY ROBERTS RINEHART, who disavows the accolade with honest indignation, is by all odds America's Number One career woman. Forty years ago she published her first best-selling novel — it sold 800,000 copies — and she has managed to keep her hand in ever since. This year her new book, *A LIGHT IN THE WINDOW* has been one of the season's outstanding successes perhaps because, as one observer put it, in a chill and disillusioned era, "a good many people want to keep the spirit warm."

No other contemporary novelist — with the possible exception of W. Somerset Maugham — has had such a wide and lasting public appeal. Altogether, counting translations into thirteen languages, Mrs. Rinehart's books have sold more than 10,000,000 copies. For two generations she has appeared regularly on the best-seller lists, and her interest for readers has survived changes in fashions, changes in custom, changes in standard. Obviously, in forty years, the roll-call of her public has changed, too; but perhaps people as people remain about the same.

It is interesting that Mrs. Rinehart's first book was published when Teddy Roosevelt was President. The hobble skirt was something of a national scandal, although most women were steeling themselves, in the interest of smartness, to a display of stockinged leg as they used the high step of a chain-drive motor car. No heroine in Mrs. Rinehart's story smoked, and, indeed, Mrs. Rinehart herself did not smoke until many years later. Chaperons constantly interfered with the normal course of romance in prosperous households, and a few forthright clergymen had spoken of the lawn hammock as a challenge to morals.

A LIGHT IN THE WINDOW outlives another Roosevelt, and it is as much in key with the times as was its earliest predecessor. Never a professional newspaperwoman, Mrs. Rinehart is an excellent reporter; little escapes her. A LIGHT IN THE WINDOW tells the story of two World War generations, with the flush times and the hard times in between, and it tells the story with wisdom, intelligence and common sense. At a time when supposedly vigorous young novelists in their twenties are sharing their self-pity with their publishers and the public, Mrs. Rinehart is, to quote the critic Lewis Gannett, "tougher, less frightened, and less despairing."

Perhaps this is Mrs. Rinehart's abiding quality. It has never occurred to her that a fellow in a side street in Pittsburgh could not pick himself up off the pavement, brush his clothes and do better. As, indeed, he often has. Mrs. Rinehart has never believed that life is easy. There has been nothing easy about her own life; there was nothing easy about her mother's life or her grandmother's life. But she has always had the feeling that someone hit with Fate's boxing glove could get up off the floor and keep on fighting. With her it's gospel.

Some writers have calling cards and own dinner jackets, and, with a shrewd glance down the dinner table, pick up the proper fork; and writers sometimes are (as Mrs. Rinehart is) in the Social Register. But, on the whole, writers only pretend to be normal people. If they were normal people they wouldn't write books. They vote in elections, they cheer at football games, and (with understandable desire for congress with the human race) they chat, more interestingly than most people, about the protracted cold spell with the doorman at the apartment house. Writers, from time's beginning, have pretended they were ordinary people, and, from the days of Norse saga-spinners and feudal minstrelsy and right down to Mary Roberts Rinehart, they have lied through their teeth.

A number of years ago Mrs. Rinehart wrote an autobiography, a singularly honest and straightforward job. But, honestly as she

wrote it, it was in some ways an inaccurate report. In the beginning she presented herself as a normal and reasonably ordinary girl in Pittsburgh who chose nursing as a profession because it seemed unlikely she could become a doctor. The facts, as Lincoln said, are true, but the conclusions are in error. Mary Roberts was neither a normal nor an ordinary girl. To be sure, she did become a nurse and she met her husband, Dr. Stanley M. Rinehart, and married him and she bore three sons and raised them and was a conscientious wife and mother. But normal and ordinary? Don't believe a word of it!

Mrs. Rinehart was a born novelist. We will go into the record a little later, and to people less than prescient it may sound pretty lucky. There was nothing lucky about it. The talent was there before the spring started spurting out of the mountain; it doesn't make much difference, with God's grace, how it was tapped. In her autobiography Mrs. Rinehart describes with almost Dickensian picture-memory the things she knew as a child: the house next door where the mute son talked on his hands to his patient white-haired mother; the wagons clattering along the cobblestones to the drovers' hotel; the quiet office of "The Mayor" where she could borrow the books of Scott, Dumas, Hugo and Thackeray; the high and gray and quiet walls of the state penitentiary a few blocks away which, if you looked at them, could hush abruptly the shrill merriment of rope-skipping and haunt you after nightfall.

These are the memories of which books and stories are made and there are others: her father, a silk hat on his head, serenely rowing his flood-beleaguered family past the second-story windows of Pittsburgh office buildings; the one-armed park policeman who marched in G.A.R. parades and took his job so seriously that he arrested his own son for a minor infraction of the law; the ludicrous scattering for cover of the street's tradesmen when drovers shouted warning of a wild bull's escape. Then there are nightmarish memories: the jolly neighborhood butcher who wore a stained straw hat — his daughter ran amok one day and killed her

mother with a meat-ax; the scream of a young laundry worker who lost her arm in a mangle and thereafter concealed her mutilation with a soiled and knitted shawl; the ultimate torture of Mary Roberts' own father's suicide before a mirror in a strange hotel.

No one knows what makes a writer write, but remembering is a part of it. And discipline puts it down. Today, as in the past, Mrs. Rinehart gets to her desk every morning. Born left-handed at a time when such a predilection was considered irrational and unladylike, she writes with her right-hand and with a bold Palmer-system sweep which seems to belie her recorded objection to the "muscular movement" school of penmanship. She writes right-handed because her left hand, in childhood, was tied behind her. And she never uses the typewriter.

Today, a widow, she lives in an eighteen-room apartment on Park Avenue in New York. She lives among a good many beautiful possessions and she is possession-conscious because these things are for her the outward symbols of achievement, the trophies of a lifetime of hard work. There are the Gainsborough and Raeburn paintings she bought at Christie's in London, the Adam side tables and the priceless Chinese Chippendale chairs. There is the lovely and spacious desk at which she produces in rapid longhand the stories which have enchanted legions of readers.

There are her jewel-boxes, too, where she keeps the bracelets and necklaces and strings of pearls she now so rarely wears. And until last summer there was an enormous place at Bar Harbor; it was burned to ashes and stone foundations when Maine forest fires engulfed the wealthy seaside town. But her most precious possession is a fountain pen. Seventeen years ago she complained in a book that she had never found a fountain pen which would write as fast as she could think. Kenneth Parker of the Parker Company read and met the challenge. Directly after MY STORY was published she received a snub-nosed pen which ever since has served the woman who has written sixty books, seven produced plays, war correspondence and articles, and innumerable short stories.

The pen is important, almost a talisman. Mrs. Rinehart confesses that if she were on a sinking ship she would jettison her jewelry and save the pen. None of her servants may touch it. When her day's work is done and she leaves the desk, the pen leaves also. It is carried to her bedside table and placed in its own special box. When Mrs. Rinehart leaves New York, the pen goes along in her purse.

The girl with the high color and crisp black hair who skipped rope outside her mother's boarding house is now a great-grandmother. Mrs. Rinehart's pride in this status furnishes the key to her persistent and often repeated denial that she is, or ever set out to be, a career woman. When she married Dr. Rinehart, her one ambition was to be a successful wife and mother. She was married at nineteen, and her sons — Stanley, Alan, and Frederick — were born before she was twenty-five. And, consciously at least, she had no intention of pursuing a literary career. Family financial difficulties made up her mind.

"My home and my family," she says, "have always been my primary and most important consideration. If I hadn't been able to earn enough to pay others to run my house smoothly, I wouldn't have worked. Any married woman who chooses a career should consider the economic value of her contribution before she makes her choice. Actually, I've never thought of myself as choosing or having a career. I've always called writing what it is — work."

Mrs. Rinehart was early introduced to financial insecurity. Her dreamy and handsome and impractical father, (from whom she believes she inherited her creative talent), was a frustrated inventor, always in pursuit of the fortune he never found — and employed in the sewing machine business, which he hated. Her mother was the practical member of the family. In an era when few women worked and those who were ladies took no pride in it, she took two roomers to enable her to carry on. The grandmother, partially blinded by cataracts, conducted a small seamstress business. Teamed with the lack of money, and controlled by the same

reins, was a valiant family struggle to keep up appearances. Mrs. Roberts was determined that her two daughters — Mary, and the younger Olive — should have what were rather sketchily described in those days as “advantages.” After school, Mary assisted with the work of the boarding house and also took piano lessons. She disliked both and with almost equal vigor.

Pittsburgh was, however, an exciting background for a future novelist. Drama and adventure and intimations of violence touched her sensitive mind earlier than most children. In one round, clear spot of memory, she sees herself standing beside her weeping mother on a riverbank while the debris and the drifting bodies of the Johnstown flood swept past; her mother was mourning the loss of a good friend. Ultimately the flood water, the wreckage of houses and barns, the sheer wastage of nature’s violence were to roll into place in a novel called *THE CASE OF JENNIE BRICE*. But Mary Roberts’ retentive mind did not know that then.

She remembered something else, an episode as haunting and terrifying as any she has written. Mary was five years old when a bedraggled woman applied for work at the house. She espied the child playing in the yard and offered to buy her candy at the corner store. The trusting Mary accompanied her, walked for miles. Hours later the child became frightened and the woman became alarmed; she led the youngster into a courtyard, robbed her of a ring and a pin and locked her in a small outbuilding. No harm was done and at dusk a policeman found the child and returned her to her parents. But it is interesting to speculate whether Mrs. Rinehart’s ability to handle scenes of terror and fear did or did not have its beginnings right there.

At the age of fifteen Mary earned her first income from writing; she sold three stories to a local newspaper at a sum total price of three dollars. More than ten years passed before she published again. Indeed, the current of her ambition had changed. A woman physician, Dr. C. Jane Vincent, had moved into the neighborhood. The schoolgirl viewed Dr. Vincent worshipfully from afar and

turned her thoughts to medicine: she would become a doctor.

A prosperous uncle offered to foot the cost of a medical education, but Mary had been graduated from high school at sixteen — two years before she was eligible for admission to a medical school. Nursing seemed to be the only answer. At that time there were in the whole United States only four hundred graduate nurses. A good many of them were pursued by the sacrificial and consecrated Florence Nightingale ideal; they were fantastically underpaid and miserably overworked.

Mary Roberts' mother's objections were vigorous. She sent her daughter to discuss her plans with the family doctor. As it happened the family doctor was out of town on vacation and a "rather severe young man" was handling his practice. The young man, made rather more severe by his pince-nez, attempted to discourage the enthusiastic maiden from an arduous profession. He was Dr. Rinehart.

At seventeen, Mary Roberts entered the Pittsburgh Training School for Nurses. In that day of twenty-four-hour duty, nurses were expected to sweep and scrub and clean out operating rooms and the youthful acolyte quickly put away the frilly aprons she had hopefully and romantically brought to the school. Her first assignment, she remembers, was to carry a pail from an operating room. In the pail was a human foot.

For two years there passed before her eyes the most primitive kind of drama: suicide and murder, accident and sudden death. She closed the eyes of the dying; in the hospital mortuary she helped prepare the dead for burial. She nursed a man who had killed his wife and cut his own throat, saved him for the gallows, and to this day wonders why. She tended alcoholics and drug addicts and prostitutes, women who had fought each other with knives and razors, women who had swallowed poison. A smallpox epidemic broke out in the hospital; nurses and patients alike were quarantined. The patients rioted and smashed the furniture; the nurses organized musical concerts to quiet them, and walked

in pairs for safety's sake. Occasionally a delirious patient did escape. She once chased a patient, trailing towels which had bound him to the bed, all the way to the street before he was captured.

In the hospital she acquired firsthand knowledge that the result of unemployment is starvation, sickness and sometimes death; firsthand she learned the meaning of social injustice. Many of the patients she cared for were factory workers, mangled by machinery in the era before safety devices were in common use. The great corporations and industries, making millions from their employees' labor, callously dumped the problem of the injured upon the community. The workman paid his own bills, or the hospital carried him.

The young nurse learned a regard for suffering and a hatred of injustice which never left her, and she also learned a respect for duty and hard work. Sometimes, late at night during a moment's respite, she recalls that she would reach for a pencil and start a story which invariably began: "The ambulance bell was clanging," and invariably stopped right there when the bell began to ring.

Dr. Rinehart was a member of the staff. Then as now, hospital rules rigidly proscribed any out-of-hours friendships between doctor and nurse. Dr. Rinehart and Mary Roberts broke the rule, fell in love, became engaged. They were married when the bride was nineteen, four days after she became a graduate nurse.

Dr. Rinehart's practice was flourishing enough to provide a maid for the cooking and heavy cleaning. But Mrs. Rinehart, whose mother had been a famous housekeeper, was determined to be as good or better. All the bread was baked at home. No one except herself was trusted with such esoteric tasks as laundering and stretching the Nottingham curtains or polishing the cherished onyx tables that had been wedding presents. She looked after the three children herself, and she also looked after answering the doctor's telephone. Since the nursery was on the third floor of the big rambling house and the telephone was on the first, she had little

difficulty in keeping down her weight. If the call was an emergency call and the doctor was out, the doctor's wife rushed from the house and gave first aid to the patient.

The family's ultimate financial difficulties were not created by nature's own provokement. Dr. and Mrs. Rinehart gambled in the stock market, and when the crash came they found their savings gone. They were also \$12,000 in debt. Mrs. Rinehart tried to fatten the family budget by sheer housewifely thrift. It quickly became apparent that the doctor's income (\$1 for office calls, \$2 for house calls) could not be made elastic enough to meet debt payment, and Mrs. Rinehart sat down at a rickety card table and started writing. Her aim was strictly commercial. During her first year at the rickety card table — she did her work when her husband was on calls and her sons in bed or at school — she sold forty-five items, (verse, short stories, articles), and earned \$1,842.50. Her first short story, she remembers, was suggested by an amnesia case which Dr. Rinehart treated. This is a theme which fascinated her so much that she has used it subsequently, and without repetitiveness, on three separate occasions.

It was Bob Davis, of the famous old *Munsey's Magazine*, who suggested that she try a serial. Bob Davis, as most people know, was the critical, kindly good shepherd of many of the talented, young writers of the day. He suggested that she do a crime thriller. To Mrs. Rinehart's protests that she knew nothing about crime, he answered blithely, "Put in a love story, too."

So blithely, without an established talent to bolster it, a new kind of serial was created. Shortly afterward, the Rineharts went to a house party in Virginia, and Mary Rinehart spent a wakeful, restless night behind the green and swaying curtains of a Pullman berth. She fell ill after she reached home, underwent a surgical operation, and began writing the story in notebooks while she was sitting in a wheel chair. *THE MAN IN LOWER TEN* was the result. It was followed, in quick succession, by *THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE*, and *THE WINDOW AT THE WHITE CAT*.

Munsey's Magazine published them all, but Mrs. Rinehart was inexperienced. As she says, she didn't think of herself as a real author. One day Uncle John, her father's successful and self-possessed brother, visited the house. He expressed a certain mild interest in her literary career, and abruptly found the dusty manuscript of *THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE* in his lap. When he finished he said, "That's a book, Mary. You ought to have it published."

Cheered by this bouquet from one of her relatives, and her relatives were notoriously an imperturbable lot, Mrs. Rinehart sent the manuscript to Bobbs-Merrill. She chose Bobbs-Merrill by one of those gambits which are plausible only to chess-players and horse-players. She took a book from her own shelves written by Anna Katherine Green. Bobbs-Merrill had published it. She sent her own novel there. What follows is sheer fairy story, but true. Bobbs-Merrill accepted the manuscript at once, wrote that Hewitt Howland, one of their editors, was coming to Pittsburgh to discuss terms. Mrs. Rinehart sat up all night making new curtains and a new bedspread for the guest room, and baking a fancy cake.

Howland arrived, ignored the bedspread and ate the cake, and asked whether Mrs. Rinehart had other manuscripts. Surrounded by Rinehart boys and Rinehart dogs he read the other serials. Mrs. Rinehart recalls that they drove Howland around Pittsburgh in a rented automobile and that she said that someday she and the Doctor hoped to own a car of their own.

"Never mind," Howland said. "Some of these days we'll buy one for you."

The Rinehart skepticism persisted. On the day the first book was published, Mrs. Rinehart scooped up her sons and went into hiding in the country to avoid the reviews. She didn't want to witness her neighbors' reaction to the fact that she, a doctor's wife and a lady, had published a crime thriller. Mrs. Rinehart could have safely stayed at home. She was hailed by the critics as bringing to the crime story the most important innovations since Conan Doyle created Sherlock Holmes: humor, and lifelike characteriza-

tion. She wrote, they said in surprise, about normal intelligent people entangled in real troubles. In triumphant succession *THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE*, *THE MAN IN LOWER TEN* and *THE WINDOW AT THE WHITE CAT* hit the national best-seller list. Forty years later the first two books are still in print.

In Mrs. Rinehart's Park Avenue apartment today there is an ancient silver filigreed Peruvian bowl which gleams above the polished wood in her foyer. A group of delicate Capo di Monte figurines dance gravely on her sideboard. "I tell my friends," she says, "that I travel to shop." But on her first trip to Europe in 1910 she did not travel to shop. Dr. Rinehart had long wanted to continue his medical studies in Vienna, to take up a specialty. Family finances now made that possible. So, taking a rain-check on her personal career, Mrs. Rinehart packed up her husband and her sons and went abroad for a protracted stay in slow, leisurely, pre-war Europe. Perhaps, though, during this comparatively idle period, she ~~was~~ shopping — subconsciously — for those ideas and impressions which are a novelist's stock in trade. It is true that an engaging sign on a winding Vienna thoroughfare started the train of invention which later resulted in *THE STREET OF SEVEN STARS*.

Mrs. Rinehart was thirty-five when the family returned to Pittsburgh, and she plunged into the hardest work of her life. Dr. Rinehart had a prosperous practice. She herself, (a play *Seven Days*, written in collaboration with Avery Hopwood, had been a Broadway success), was earning a large income. However, quite on her own, she had bought a house. She put every penny of her savings into a \$50,000 mansion, and then discovered it needed a few minor repairs. Those repairs grew agonizingly into a major remodeling job which doubled the original cost. For months, writing ten and twelve hours a day, she barely managed to keep abreast of the contractors' bills. It was during a period of crisis when she had actually less than \$300 in the bank that a local clergyman innocently asked her to contribute a pipe organ to his church.

"Everybody seems to think," says Mrs. Rinehart wryly, "that all popular writers are rich. It is possible for writers to invest their earnings wisely, but I certainly hadn't done so. No one realizes that writers are spending their capital — their creative power — with every story they write."

Mrs. Rinehart got the house, but she wrote herself into a hospital. Would she do it again? She probably would. The big place at Sewickley, looking down over the Ohio River, she remembers with love and affection. Her boys were young there and at home. It was a symbol of success. But a house that size meant a staff: butler, cook, housemaid, gardener, chauffeur, laundress, secretary. She maintained an office in town where she could work without interruption. And she still quotes Dr. Rinehart's realistic comment when the last bill was paid.

"What shall we call it?" she asked.

"The Bluff," he said. "That's what we're putting up."

The years after swept swiftly by, and they were full years. The fiction writer became eventually a war correspondent for *The Saturday Evening Post*. That was 1915. Just as ingenious as the gal correspondents of the Second World War, but considerably less grubby, Mrs. Rinehart arrived in Dunkirk as it was being shelled by German planes in honor of the Kaiser's birthday. Then, as now, she was well dressed, and subsequently — in the face of determined prohibitions — she appeared in the Belgian front lines wearing white gloves and a fashionable fur coat. By one stratagem or another, later she also visited the French and British front lines.

There were the years after the United States entered the war when she toured Army camps as an investigator for Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War; it was strictly undercover work. The family was dispersed. Dr. Rinehart had become Major Rinehart, one of three men in charge of registration for the draft; the two older boys enlisted and Ted, the youngest, was serving in the Home Guard while at a Preparatory School. And then there were the quiet and happier years in Washington after the war. Stanley had

joined a New York publishing firm; Alan worked as a reporter on a Washington newspaper; Ted was in college.

Dr. Rinehart then was consultant in tuberculosis in the Veterans' Bureau. For a time the pace slowed up. Mrs. Rinehart already had behind her *THE AMAZING INTERLUDE*, and *K*, and she was still delighting the public with her drily humorous stories about a certain Letitia Carberry and her two spinster companions. The "Tish" series gave more pleasure to a generation of Americans than current magazine fiction promises to achieve. But there came a time when Mrs. Rinehart could not touch her pen to a Tish story without a feeling of profound and acute nausea. Without obsequies she permitted Tish to go to a well-deserved rest.

Back in 1916 she had reported the Republican and Democratic conventions for the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* Syndicate. Theodore Roosevelt, Charles Evans Hughes, and other party titans became her warm, personal friends. The Rineharts, confirmed Republicans — even later Mrs. Rinehart could never bring herself to like the New Deal or F.D.R. — sold their Sewickley house and moved to Washington shortly after President Harding took office. But independently they quickly became disillusioned with the Harding regime. Dr. Rinehart resigned in despair from a corrupt Veterans' Bureau. Mrs. Rinehart now says of Harding, "He was a gay and trusting man, the victim of his friends." After the purchase of a residence on Massachusetts Avenue, Mrs. Rinehart became one of the most fashionable and active of Washington hostesses. Her friendship with former President Hoover continues to this day. He appointed her to the Public Lands Commission (she is the only woman who ever served on it) and now when he is in New York they dine together. Once, in the White House, Hoover expressed a desire to read her forthcoming book. It was in galley proofs, and by the next night Mrs. Rinehart had the galleys cut and bound and in the President's hands.

It was early in their Washington years that Dr. Rinehart took over the business management of his wife's finances. It had taken

a long time for her to confess to her own extravagance. "I could make money," she says, "but I couldn't keep it." Just after the first World War she had written another play in collaboration with Avery Hopwood, and it is famous in theatrical annals as the most successful of all mystery plays. *The Bat* was played in seven different languages and grossed several million dollars. Half of Mrs. Rinehart's one-fourth interest ~~was~~ absorbed by taxes, but it was the sensible investment of the residue by Dr. Rinehart — rather than her subsequent earning capacity — which has made her a comparatively wealthy woman.

These were even and reasonably pleasant years. Once, during the long-lived career of *The Bat* she had four plays current on Broadway. Her sons attained maturity and went into the publishing business. Stanley is president of Rinehart & Co., Ted is Vice President. Alan, a free-lance writer, is on the board of directors. When the depression years began to blow down young publishing firms like cottonwoods on a riverbank, Mrs. Rinehart dropped a serious novel to do one of her best mysteries, *THE DOOR* — and wrote her sons a tremendous best-seller, which proved an important asset at the time.

Dr. Rinehart died in 1932, and shortly afterward Mrs. Rinehart moved to New York. It had been an able partnership. Dr. Rinehart was ruddy, forthright, plain-speaking, and (although he didn't seem so) a singularly intuitive man. He did like to ride horses too fast over too-high hurdles, but he liked all life at that pace. He was not literary, but he had a real sense of prose style, and he was a shrewd critic. Also, in his capacity as a tuberculosis specialist, he was far ahead of his time in certain diagnostic speculations which are now doctrinal gospel.

An analysis of Mrs. Rinehart's work, I suppose, will show the conflicts, the inconsistencies, the many different people in the one person who produced it. She has written serious novels, farces, melodramas, and some of the best puzzle stories ever run off the presses. According to her own testimony, she regards herself as

a good craftsman and as a good storyteller, and not as a literary genius. "If I agonized like a Chekov over my work, and I did," she wrote once, "the resemblance ceased there." But as storyteller and craftsman there are few to surpass her.

Such books as *THE LIGHT IN THE WINDOW* and *THE DOCTOR* seem to offer pretty good evidence that Mrs. Rinehart is at her excellent best as a realist. But in the beginning she wrote joyfully to escape. She was eager to share with others her ebullience, her feeling of excitement and strangeness; her impatience with the back streets of Pittsburgh matched the impatience of her contemporaries with back streets and main streets everywhere in America. At the same time there was in her a conviction which still troubles her on occasion, a haunting and almost superstitious conviction that happiness, security, even physical safety are somewhat tenuous possessions. Many of her personal experiences appear to bear this out.

Just last year, for example, a trusted servant who had been in her employ for twenty-five years went mad and attempted to assassinate her. He was Blas Reyes, a Filipino chef whose culinary expertness was famous. Tired of life himself, the would-be assassin endeavored to take his mistress along, and was thwarted only by the quick action of a chauffeur and maid who wrested the gun from his hand. After his arrest Reyes hanged himself in jail. His wife is still in Mrs. Rinehart's service.

Sometimes Mrs. Rinehart becomes a little irked with folk who consider mystery stories the stepchildren of literature. Actually, her mystery stories — such classics as *THE WALL*, *THE DOOR*, and *THE YELLOW ROOM* — often take her longer to produce than more formidable novels. Her humor in speaking of the matter is likely to be on the astringent side. Not long ago a celebrated — and pontifical — political writer told her he had decided to take a brief vacation to "toss off" a mystery novel. How should he go about it?

"It's really quite simple," Mrs. Rinehart said coldly. "You just write two stories as one. Your open story runs along like a straight

line, and underneath, rising like a diagonal to meet the straight line in the end, is the hidden story. Of course you must remember to allow the hidden story, or the diagonal line, to pop up three or four times during the narrative in the form of clues. Otherwise, you aren't being fair to the reader."

This is probably the best definition of a good mystery story ever put in print, but the columnist decided not to profit by it.

One commentator has spoken of Mrs. Rinehart as "the best-dressed, best-housed and least-bohemian writer in the world." Still strikingly handsome, and looking as though she has just stepped out of a Bergdorf Goodman fitting room (which she quite probably has) she continues to be a woman of remarkable energy and vitality. It is difficult for most folk to realize that she has been plagued by ill health for years. In 1947, for instance, she spent two months in bed following her third thrombosis. She is as much interested in this medical curiosity as you are: few people survive two. Reluctantly she has given up her favorite recreations, mountain climbing and horseback riding. But she still sees no reason why she should not land an occasional Florida tarpon, and she continues to consume a pack of cigarettes a day and ignores her doctor's admonition that they are bad for her heart.

Mrs. Rinehart, justifiably, considers her health her own private concern. Only if the matter is pursued does one learn that she has undergone fifteen surgical operations in her lifetime. But her own medical background makes her impatient with the hush-hush and closed-curtain approach to the discussion of disease. Some months ago she grew indignant enough to allow a national magazine to print in detail the story of how she was successfully operated on for cancer in 1936. Her reason for the disclosure was characteristic. She felt it her duty to reveal her own experience for the benefit of other women who might be hesitating to seek an early diagnosis.

Order is the primary rule of Mrs. Rinehart's life. She is bewildered when she hears of more happy-go-lucky craftsmen who

repair to their desks only when the Yankees aren't playing or when there is nothing better to do. To this very day, after breakfast in bed, she picks up her pen at exactly ten every morning and lays it down, usually, at three p.m. On a good day she writes 4,000 words; on a poor day, 2,000 words. Saturday, by her schedule, is set aside for answering correspondence; a secretary comes to the apartment to help her dispose of the letters which have accumulated during the week. Her fan mail is heavy and she answers it all.

There is another daily engagement which she faithfully observes. When Mrs. Rinehart is in New York she is always to be found at home and at her tea table at five o'clock. Her three sons and their families live within a few comfortable blocks of her apartment. Any member of the clan who cares to drop in of a late afternoon can be sure of a welcome. There is no shop talk at the tea hour unless a crisis has arisen. Mrs. Rinehart never discusses a work in progress; she has left the manuscript on her desk and compartmented in her mind. But she is always willing to listen, and, if called upon, will say exactly what she thinks. She often does. She reads many of the publishing house's manuscripts, and she may offer detailed comment or suggest revisions and improvements.

Mrs. Rinehart plans to go to Bar Harbor again this summer. Her twenty-four-room house on Frenchmen's Bay, of course, was burned to the ground and many personal treasures are gone. She has rented another house; she will entertain as usual. Bar Harbor will not be the same, but Mrs. Rinehart will be. Her house will still run in smooth orderly fashion and on clockwork schedule — as usual.

BOOKS BY MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

with brief notes on them by Mrs. Rinehart

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

My Story: In which I look back over an adventure in living. 1931
(Revised 1948)

MYSTERIES

The Circular Staircase: My first book, in which for the first time it was shown that mystery, crime and humor can be combined. 1908

The Man In Lower Ten: A story which ruined the sale of lower berth No. 10 on American railroads for at least three years. 1909

The Window at the White Cat: More crime and mystery. 1910

The Case of Jennie Brice: A story laid at the time of a great flood. 1913

The After House: In which I kill three people with one axe, raising the average number of murders per crime book to a new high level. 1914

Sight Unseen and the Confession: Studies in the psychology of fear and crime. 1921

The Red Lamp: In which a murder is committed every time the sinister red lamp goes out. 1925

Miss Pinkerton: The nerve-shattering adventure of Nurse Adams. 1932

The Album: The answer to four gruesome murders lies in a dusty album for anyone to see. 1933

The Wall: I commit three shocking murders in a fashionable New England summer colony. 1938

The Great Mistake: A murder story set in the suburbs, involving a bag of toads, a pair of trousers and some missing keys. 1940

Haunted Lady: Some of my readers wanted another story about Miss Pinkerton, the nurse detective, so here she gets involved in murder in the Fairbanks mansion. 1942

The Yellow Room: I used my Bar Harbor house for this; the yellow bedroom on the second floor, and the linen closet near the back stairs. 1945

NOVELS

When A Man Marries: Afterward made into the successful farce *Seven Days*. A comedy of a quarantined dinner party. 1909

Where There's A Will: A young man inherits a sanatorium with a mineral spring; also a group of grouches. 1912

The Street of Seven Stars: The love story of a little American girl in Vienna. 1914

K: The romance of a quiet street and a hospital nurse. 1915

Long Live the King: A romantic adventure laid in southeastern Europe. 1917

The Amazing Interlude: The story of Sara Lee and Henri "whose identity cannot be revealed." 1918

Dangerous Days: A story of marriage and its failure. 1919

A Poor Wise Man: Three great generations of a great house. 1920

The Breaking Point: Based on the strange ability of the mind to forget what it cannot bear to remember. 1922

Lost Ecstasy: The effort of a young Eastern woman reared in wealth to adjust herself to marriage to a cowboy and the life of the West. 1927

Two Flights Up: In which a charming romance is threatened by a mystery. 1928

This Strange Adventure: The story of a woman. 1929

The State Versus Elinor Norton: A psychological study of a sensitive and beautiful woman who is driven to commit murder. 1934

The Doctor: The struggle of a doctor to reconcile his professional career with his domestic life. 1936

A Light in the Window: My first non-mystery novel since *The Doctor*, this is a story of an American family in the period between the two World Wars. 1948

SHORT STORIES

The Amazing Adventures of Letitia Carberry: 1911

Tish: 1916

More Tish: 1921

Tish Plays the Game: 1926

Tish Marches On: 1937

Bab: A sub-deb. The adolescent feminine mind translated into action. 1917

Love Stories: 1919

Twenty-three and One-half Hours' Leave: Humor and love in an army camp. 1919

Affinities and Other Stories: 1920

The Truce of God: A story of the middle ages and of the Droit de Seigneur. 1920

Temperamental People: Stories of human emotions in action. 1924

The Romantics: Tales of people who have the gift of dreaming.
1929

Mr. Cohen Takes A Walk: 1934

Married People: Romances of wedded life. 1937

Familiar Faces: Stories of people you know. 1941

Alibi For Isabel: 1944

TRAVEL

Through Glacier Park: A little book that became a guide to the
national park. 1916

Tenting Tonight: A book of personal experiences with the tribula-
tions and delights of camping in the West. 1918

The Out Trail: Adventures on rough Western trails. 1922

Nomad's Land: Adventures in Egypt and elsewhere. 1926

WAR

Kings, Queens and Pawns: A record of experiences as war corre-
spondent at the front during the World War. 1915

The Altar of Freedom: 1917

PLAYS

The Bat (with Avery Hopwood).

Seven Days (with Avery Hopwood).

Spanish Love (adaptation, with Avery Hopwood).

The Breaking Point

DESIGNED BY STEFAN SALTER

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